

Better early than never by grossalien

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

Genre: Adult Eddie Kaspbrak, Adult Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Adult Richie Tozier, I'll tag more as I update, M/M, Mentioned Losers Club (IT), Teenage Eddie Kaspbrak, Teenage Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier, Teenage Richie Tozier, Time Travel

Language: English

Characters: Eddie Kaspbrak, Richie Tozier

Relationships: Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-12-05

Updated: 2019-12-04

Packaged: 2019-12-17 16:52:58

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,545

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Most of the time, when you finally want to make things right, the universe won't let you. And some other times, but only very rarely, it will give you the second chance you probably don't even deserve.

In which Richie finally gets his shit together, after coming back to Derry, and tries to confess his feelings to Eddie but something unbelievably ridiculous happens.

Better early than never

Richie couldn't be more uncomfortable. It's one thing to go back to the town that once caused you all the trauma that still follows you until today, which, by the way, is a lot already, but another one entirely is having to deal with the person you've been in love with since you were a stupid teen. The person you had forgotten until today but somehow you still have feelings for.

Yeah, that fucking guy.

How does that work anyway? How can you forget about 'the love of your life' for over two decades and still be not over them? Where is the damn closure? What the fuck is closure? Who invented that fucking shit?

"Richie." The voice of, quotation marks emphasized, the love of his life interrupted his thoughts. "You okay, man?"

"Yeah, no, I'm fine, just thinking about stuff."

Eddie laughed dryly. "I get that. I've been thinking about running away ever since..." He frowned. The sentence could finish itself on its own.

Running away. That's exactly what Richie felt like doing once he walked into that chinese dinner and saw Eddie in the flesh again. Run until he forgot about Eddie again. Run until Eddie forgot about him again. Just run.

And then Mike started talking about that fucking clown and it absolutely, definitely, undeniably made it worse. Forget running away, he wanted to burn Derry to the ground.

But that's exactly what the clown wanted, right? For them to be scared, for them to want to flee. And after that pure terror had consumed the shit out of them, he would eat them. 'Cause he fed on that, right? Their fears? Something like that.

Well, in theory at least.

The bright side of all this mess was that, maybe, for a bit, Richie wouldn't have to care about the consequences of his actions. Since chances are he wouldn't make it out alive anyway.

This fact was starting to dawn on him.

He stopped right in his tracks.

"Eddie..." He said without thinking it enough.

"Mmh?" Eddie turned around with those big, so damn big, eyes of his.

Richie's stomach sank again. Maybe being eaten by Pennywise was still the better option. Being wiped out of this planet forever by a timeless clown. It wasn't all that bad, in perspective. A deserved ending for someone like him. Sadly, the clown didn't accept delivery suicide requests just yet.

"Richie?" Eddie had stopped too, his eyebrows lifted in concern. "Are you sure you're okay?"

They were in the middle of some random street that they once probably knew like the palm of their hands but now it was just melancholy inducing and only vaguely familiar. Everyone else had gone their own ways, searching for the tokens that Mike insisted were so important. Richie wasn't really excited to reconnect with Pennywise or, well, any of his other issues. He already knew where he had to go, he just didn't want to and, from the looks of it, neither did Eddie.

I mean, seriously, what kind of therapy was this? Oh, yeah, let's just separate and confront our deep rooted traumas, alone, in this creepy ass town where there's a murderous clown in the hiding! Who's with me! Gee, Mike, you absolute genius! What's next, go to the clown's place and start fighting it with our bare hands? Oh, wait, we're gonna do that, too! And if we don't, we're gonna die horribly? Nothing but good news and genuine fun during this fucking visit!

To be honest, Richie didn't care about conquering his fear or growing as a person or any of that corny shit the rest of the Losers would try

to preach to him. He just wasn't very cool with the idea of dying with regrets, and boy, did he have a lot of those. So if he could check at least one off the list, maybe he wouldn't be so miserable at the time of his (very probably near) demise.

He breathed in very carefully, if he choked now it would be about the worst confession ever.

"I have to tell you something."

His friend replied in a confused tone. "O...kay?"

Richie continued, ignoring the way his heart felt like it was rising to his throat. "It's important. Honestly I never wanted to tell you this and it might be just about the worst timing ever but..."

"What is it, Rich?"

Richie froze mid sentence, his mouth hanging open. Anxiety had crept its way onto Eddie's face. He hated being the cause of that. Now it was definitely too late to back off. He swallowed tensely. How could he say this in a way that wouldn't upset Eddie...too much? The last thing either of them needed was more stress and he was about to drop a goddamn bomb on his childhood friend. He peered at the concrete under his feet.

Alright, Trashmouth, it's now or never.

"I've always..." He tried looking back up and was met with Eddie's ridiculously huge eyes. They were full of apprehension now. What was he getting so stressed for? He wasn't the one about to confess the one thing he had been trying to hide his entire life. He avoided his stare again.

"Always..." He repeated.

"Ri-Richie?"

No. Nope. Nuh-huh. No way. No, no, no. Absolutely no fucking way. He wasn't gonna say shit. Not now or ever. Pennywise could come and eat him anytime, he wasn't gonna speak. This secret was dying with him.

Richie cleared his throat. "Yeah, no, I was just wondering if we should-"

Look for our tokens together? Are you a fucking idiot? You go to the arcade with him and he's gonna find out you're a homo, you stupid asshole. God damn it, Richie.

"The..."

"Dude, what is it? You're worrying me." Eddie was getting impatient and rightly so because Richie was giving Bill a run for his money with this stammering.

He faked a smile, probably one of his top 5 fakest smiles ever but that was Richie alright, the guy who always smiled on the outside and rarely on the inside. "Just thinking maybe we should part ways here."

Eddie seemed underwhelmed. "Oh. Right. Right."

"We don't want to make the group wait, haha." Richie wanted to praise himself for even being able to poorly perform a laughing noise when he actually felt like fainting.

"Yeah I. Yeah we should do that. Sorry. I got distracted. I'll be going then." Without glancing back at his friend, Eddie walked forward and it only took a second.

It only took a second for Richie to remember.

How he was unable to tell him back then, when Eddie left Derry, back when they were just teenagers. He just watched Eddie's back get more and more far away, his eyes burning with tears. His choked up voice locked by his closed lips. He didn't want to feel like that ever again. It didn't matter if it went badly, if Eddie didn't want to speak to him anymore. I mean, they probably wouldn't see each other again if they survived this, right? Maybe Richie could finally move on. Finally find the closure he was waiting for. He smirked at himself, knowing how unlikely that was.

"Eddie! Wait." He shouted, perhaps a bit too loud.

Eddie turned to meet him with a surprised expression. They weren't

too far apart but Richie felt like closing the gap anyway. “Sorry, I lied just now. I’m full of shit. I don’t want you to go away. I’ve never wanted you to go away. Never. For the past 27 years of my life I’ve-”

He could only afford to see Eddie’s eyes widening (seriously how big could that guy’s eyes get) before it happened.

It was out of nowhere. A beam of light, so bright that it blinded him momentarily. And then everything turned dark.

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Richie woke up coughing, tasting the ground he was lying on. He attempted to stand up but a headache stronger than his worst hangovers attacked him. He sat and held his head, the muscles of his face contorting in pain. Where the hell was he? Did he drink too much last night? I mean, probably, but nothing he wasn’t used to. Probably.

He opened his eyes just faintly and everything was blurry. Right, his glasses. With a clumsy hand he searched for them. They were just a few centimeters away from where his head was moments ago. He put them on and tried looking around. Still blurry but getting better.

Jesus, Richie, did you accidentally pass out in the woods after crying for hours because your childhood crush is married now?

Right, Eddie!

Everything came back to him.

He was about to confess to Eddie fucking Kaspbrak when some lightning saved him from his own stupidity. But how did he end in the woods then? Wait, was this the clown at it again? Also where the fuck was Eddie?

“Oh my god. No, no, no, no no. What’s happening. What’s going on. Ugh, I’m so fucking dirty, mom’s gonna kill me. Wait. Richie? Oh my god, where am I. Fuck!’ A voice Richie thought would never heard again yelled behind him.

He turned in slow motion, like in a cliché horror movie.

A boy, too small for his age, with his hair brushed backwards and an expression that signaled an imminent anxiety attack was there. The kid was cleaning the dirt off his shorts way too short for a boy, the fanny pack on his waist vibrating with his movements. He hadn't noticed him yet. Richie fell against the tree trunk behind him.

There was no doubt.

He was looking at teenager Eddie Kaspbrak.

Man, was Pennywise good with his illusions. Gutsy fucking clown.

"Was this your best idea, you fucking asshole? Do you think this is gonna scare me? Do you think I'm gonna start shitting my pants now? Not even close, you dipshit!" He cried out, startling the boy. They locked eyes.

Damn, he was uncannily similar to the real thing. Like insanely so. Fucking creepy shit. "You can't stop me now! You can't stop me from saying what I wanted to say! I'm not gonna be scared by some replica!" He continued.

The brat had the same disturbthe real Eddie would and opened his mouth to speak, probably to throw in some cheap taunting, but Richie beat him to it by screaming with all his might. "I love you, Eddie Kaspbrak! I've always loved you! I loved you even before knowing love wasn't just putting dicks inside holes! I love you and I will always regret not having told you sooner!"

The bespectacled man grinned in satisfaction. He had won. Yeah, the fake Eddie would transform into Pennywise at any moment now and eat him alive but he won, still. The stupid clown couldn't scare him anymore. He had confessed the thing he was most scared to confess to the person he least wanted to confess. Well, it wasn't the real deal but you gotta celebrate the small victories. Richie could die slightly happier now. What a dream.

The fake-Eddie was shocked.

"I got you now, didn't I? I bet you didn't expect that, you sloppy bitch!." Richie exclaimed, triumphant.

He reached to touch the Pennywise-Eddie's lifted arm but was slapped away. What the hell? Why would the clown, of all fucking things, reject him? Wasn't he gonna give him a painful death and all that shit? Was he losing his touch or some shit? Richie squinted.

Oh shit.

Oh. Shit.

That wasn't Pennywise.

It was the real Eddie, in the flesh.

Right in front of him.

Richie tried to move backwards but a powerful hit on the back reminded him of the existence of tree trunk behind him.

Hey, Trashmouth, what the fuck did you have last night? This is worse than that one horrible trip you had from eating too many edibles back in college... Wait, is this hell?

Eddie took his silence as a cue to start babbling. "Did you just...what the fuck. How do you know my name even- wait, don't talk to me!" He covered his mouth, apparently realizing something. "Don't tell me..." He turned his head towards the town, not too far away from them, and started yelling "Help! Help me! There's a fucking pedophile! Help me! Somebody help me please! He's gonna kidnap me!"

This definitely has to be hell.

Still refusing to accept the situation, Richie exclaimed on instinct "What? No! Stop!" while trying to grab Eddie's arm again.

The latter shrieked. "Don't touch me! Don't fucking touch me! I'm calling the police, you know! They're coming over here as we speak! Look!"

Instead of being offended, Richie simply snorted. "You and me both know how useless the cops are in this city, Eds."

“Don’t call me-” Taken aback by the nickname, Eddie lowered his defenses.

The man saw his chance. *Alright, don’t screw this up, Richie. Remember how scared we all were of adults.*

“It’s me, Richie.” He smiled in the most non-threatening way he could think of. *Please don’t scream. Please don’t scream. Please don’t scream.* If the kid yelled any more he could get in serious trouble.

Eddie grimaced in disbelief while still staring into this eyes. After a few seconds, he found it. The remains of the Trashmouth he knew in that old man’s face. He exhaled heavily, the dazement written all over his features.

The man tried to help. “I know, I know, it’s really fucking wild and I-”

“You didn’t grow into your looks.” Eddie cut him off abruptly.

Richie scowled with exasperation “What.”

“Well, Beverly said...you’d grow into your looks...you didn’t. Your hairline is receding and that facial hair is awful.” Eddie said with almost disappointment in his voice.

First he thought I was a pedo and now he’s calling me ugly? Kid, leave me some self-esteem, would you?

“Alright, thanks bud. Missed you too.” Richie retorted sarcastically.

The boy didn’t show remorse. “So are you gonna explain what’s going on or what? If you do anything weird I’ll scream again.” He threatened. Despite everything, he sounded pretty collected.

“No need to say it twice. And I have no fucking clue.” Richie replied while scratching his head. The fact that he was in front of the decades-younger version of his crush was starting to sink in and it was way too much to take in, just like that. Then again, he was in Derry so it wasn’t entirely unlikely that this was actually happening. “The timing was so fucking weird too...” Suddenly something clicked in his mind. “Wait, you where with me, right? I heard you call my

name earlier.”

Eddie nodded. “Yeah! We were...” He gazed down, seemingly remembering something. “We were going to...” Upon closer inspection, his eyes were misty.

Don't tell me...

Richie gulped. “What date is it, Eddie?”

The aforementioned raised his head in confusion. “Huh? It's June 30.” After a short pause, he added “Of 1990. You know what that means right-wait, what year are you from even?”

The 40 year old man stood petrified.

Oh, you gotta be kidding me.

So that's what this all was about, wasn't it?

What kind of twisted joke was this?

Author's Note:

My first multichapter I guess? I don't plan to make this too long but hey, it's something. Thanks again to my girlfriend (@shouri on twitter) for cheering me up and giving me tips.